

Case 2877***Lycognathophis* Boulenger, 1893 (Reptilia, Serpentes): proposed conservation**

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Abstract. The purpose of this application is to conserve the name *Lycognathophis* Boulenger, 1893, a genus of snake from the Seychelles. The name is consistently used but is a junior objective synonym of *Scopelophis* Fitzinger, 1843, for which suppression is proposed.

1. *Psammophis seychellensis* Schlegel, 1837 (p. 155) is probably the only endemic snake species of the Seychelle Islands (Nussbaum, 1984). The species was assigned to various polytypic genera in its early history (see Dowling, 1990), and was first placed in a genus of its own by Fitzinger (1843, p. 26), who named it *Scopelophis*. That name was not used, however, until 1990 when Dowling revived it. Its neglect was initially due to rejection of availability of generic names such as Fitzinger's which were published without description but which included previously described species.

2. Boulenger (1893, p. 317) also concluded that *P. seychellensis* was generically unique and proposed the name *Lycognathophis* for it. Since then the species has consistently been known as *Lycognathophis seychellensis*. Dowling (1990) revived *Scopelophis* for it, stating that 'Inasmuch as this invalid (and misleading) name [*Lycognathophis*] has appeared in relatively few publications, and placing it in synonymy will have little overall effect on the taxonomic literature, I here refer *Lycognathophis* Boulenger, 1893 to the synonymy of *Scopelophis* Fitzinger, 1843'. However, the title of Dowling's publication mentioned only *Lycognathophis*.

3. On the contrary, *Lycognathophis* has been used consistently as a valid name for a century, during which time *Scopelophis* had not been used at all. Boulenger's name has appeared in at least 23 works by 21 different authors between 1893 and 1991 (e.g. Vesey-FitzGerald, 1948; Honegger, 1966; Underwood, 1967; Gaymer, 1968; Blanc, 1971; Dowling & Duellman, 1978; Welch, 1982; Nussbaum, 1984; McDowell, 1987; Coborn, 1991). The full list of references, held by the Commission Secretariat, is certainly not exhaustive, especially for the popular writings.

4. The span and frequency of usages for these two names overwhelmingly justify invoking Article 79(c) of the Code, since 'the senior name has not been used as a valid name during the immediately preceding fifty years' and the junior name has been applied '... by at least 5 different authors and in at least 10 publications during the

same period'. We regard the usages of *Lycognathophis* cited above as distinctly more than 'relatively few' publications, and also point out that a number of those cited are highly influential synoptic works, as for example Welch (1982), Nussbaum (1984) and Williams & Wallach (1989). We therefore view the revival of *Scopelophis* as an unnecessary, undesirable and significant threat to nomenclatural stability.

5. The International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature is accordingly asked:

- (1) to use its plenary powers to suppress the generic name *Scopelophis* Fitzinger, 1843 for the purposes of the Principle of Priority but not for those of the Principle of Homonymy;
- (2) to place on the Official List of Generic Names in Zoology the name *Lycognathophis* Boulenger, 1893 (gender: masculine), type species by monotypy *Psammophis seychellensis* Schlegel, 1837;
- (3) to place on the Official List of Specific Names in Zoology the name *seychellensis* Schlegel, 1837, as published in the binomen *Psammophis seychellensis* (specific name of the type species of *Lycognathophis* Boulenger, 1893);
- (4) to place on the Official List of Rejected and Invalid Names in Zoology the name *Scopelophis* Fitzinger, 1843, as suppressed in (1) above.

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